



"I will pour out my Spirit upon all...  
and your young shall see visions  
and your old shall dream dreams."  
--Acts 2:17

# Voices & Visions

A publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

Volume I, Number 2

April/May, 1999

## *Thoughts about the Amistad*

*In Honor of Amistad Sunday, March 7, 1999*

*By June Fox Davis*

The *Amistad* incident was one of the most significant events in American history, because the Constitution of the United States—which was not designed to protect persons of African ancestry—allowed justice to prevail for 53 African men captured aboard a slave ship. Considering all that was going on in the country during the early 1800s, the liberation of these Mendi captives—men who had rebelled and taken charge of the ship—is nothing short of a miracle. These men were foreigners, unable to speak the language of this new land, who became prisoners of a country where slavery was accepted by many and protected by law.

I first learned of the *Amistad* when I enrolled at Talladega College in the fall of 1953. An important part of freshman orientation was to tour Savery Library, view the now famous murals, and be told the story of Cinque and the *Amistad* revolt. The experience did not stop there. We continued to hear about the *Amistad* incident from time to time on special occasions.

I understood the importance of the incident at that time, but the true significance did not become real until I came face to face with the horrors of racism and prejudice during the turbulent 1960s. Having lived all of my life in the Deep South, I was very aware of the laws and customs specifically designed to perpetuate segregation and racism. The difference was that I had not seen or experienced the passionate hate and violence that it breeds.

When I think back to my days at Talladega, I realize that the faculty and staff—many of whom were from New England and the American Missionary Association tradition—used the story of the *Amistad* to instill in us the truth that we are entitled to the same rights as any other human on this earth. Justice is possible, and we must not settle for less.

The story of the *Amistad* is one of courage and stubborn persistence on the part of many individuals to ensure equal protection by law for everyone. For Christians, it is a perfect example of how God works. The outcome of the *Amistad* incident is something that all Americans can be proud of. The story of a slave ship named *Amistad* is one to remember and pass on.

*La Amistad*

Alpha Omega



# *“Grace to you, and peace ...”*

## *A Letter from the Conference Minister*

Dear Friends:

I was raised in a family in which there were two things we did not talk about, and one of them was money. We considered it impolite. So it was a revelation for me in seminary to have a field placement supervisor say, “If you really want to know what an organization’s values and theology are, look at its budget.” The way an organization spends its money tells more about its priorities than any number of eloquent statements or pronouncements about its ministries. This is true for our family budgets, and for the budgets of our congregations and conferences as well.

At a recent denominational meeting, we celebrated that **OCWM (Our Church’s Wider Mission) National Basic Support** is higher than it has ever been. I thought you might be interested in how your **OCWM** dollars are spent and what kind of theological statement we are making with our giving.

In the Southeast Conference, we received **\$180,534** in **OCWM Basic Support** for 1998. We pledged **\$20,000** of that to the United Church of Christ in its national setting. At the Conference level, your giving makes possible the operation of our offices and the support of our staff. In the last three years, we have directed our staff to serve you as fully as possible in our local congregations, deploying them to help strengthen and revitalize local ministries. Our operating expenses are modest and are directed mostly to coordinating communication and maintaining our presence in the local church settings. The **\$20,000** that we send to the church in its national setting breaks down as follows, in rounded figures:

<b>United Church Board for World Ministries</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>United Church Board for Homeland Ministries</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>Executive Offices</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Pension Boards</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Office of Church and Society</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Office of Church Life and Leadership &amp; the Stewardship Council</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Office of Communication</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Commission on Racial Justice</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Coordinating Center for Women</b>	<b>3%</b>

It may be of interest to you that the national church returns to the Southeast Conference more money than we send through **OCWM**, to support us in our mission. The money you commit to special offerings such as **One Great Hour of Sharing, Neighbors In Need, Just Peace, and Hunger Action** goes directly through our offices to support mission. All of this is to say that, when you look at our budget, we are a people in mission in the local church, at the Conference level, and in the national setting.

Thank you for your generous support that makes this mission possible. If you are interested in additional details concerning how your dollars are spent, don’t hesitate to call us in the Conference Office. We are proud of our stewardship, and of your generosity.

In Christ,  
*Timothy C. Downs*

### *Stop the Suffering!*

Many of us have heard Rev. Joyce Myers-Brown plead for support in helping to end the scourge of land mines worldwide. Every 22 minutes, someone, somewhere—often a child—steps on a mine and is killed or maimed. Between 70 and 80 million land mines remain hidden in the ground in 68 nations.

Now Joyce shares with us an opportunity to make a difference in the life of a community in a heavily mined area of Mozambique, Africa. The United Nations Association of the USA has begun a project called “Adopt-a-Minefield,” and Joyce is chairing this effort for the Atlanta Chapter, with the support of concerned individuals and groups throughout the Southeast. Rev. Andrew Young, former UN ambassador and Atlanta mayor, has agreed to serve as Honorary Chair. They are raising money for the de-mining of a village in Gaza Province, Mozambique, so that people can again farm and children can play in safety.

**Please help!** Contact Joyce Myers-Brown (404-876-2421) for more information, or to invite her to speak to your group. Or send a contribution to UNA-USA Atlanta Chapter, P.O. Box 11662, Atlanta, GA 30355, earmarked “Adopt-a-Minefield.”

# *Bringing a Little Light*

## *Medical Team Makes a Trip to Honduras*

### *By Dick Braun*

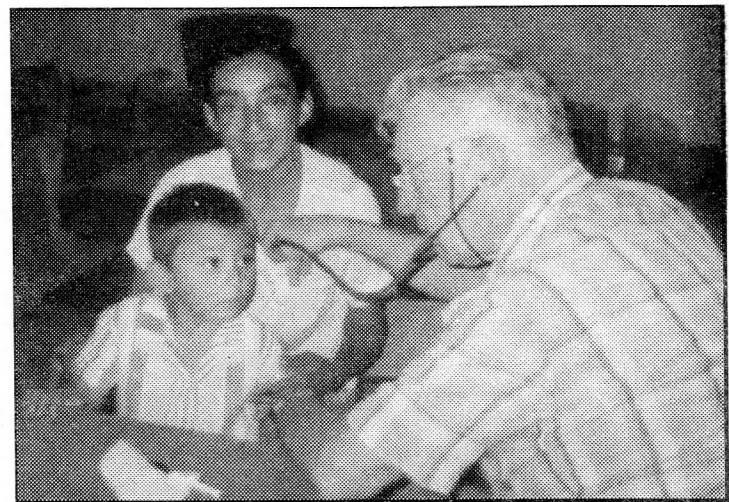
In October 1998, Hurricane Mitch devastated the Central American countries of Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Honduras. Honduras, the poorest country in Central America, suffered the most, with thousands of lives lost and homes destroyed.

In response to an appeal by Church World Service, I joined a medical relief team in Honduras from January 24 to February 6. Our ecumenical "brigade" included five other North Americans: a family physician from New Hampshire (Jewish); three nurses (one Mennonite, two Disciples of Christ), and a recreation therapist (Roman Catholic). We were joined by an experienced Honduran nurse and three interpreters.

We worked under the CWS counterpart, the Christian Commission for Development, which has a long history of effective service in Honduras. We held clinics for ten straight days in eight towns in the Copan Department near the Guatemalan border. Although it was not one of the worst hit parts of the country, the roads were in sad shape and treacherous, and many houses and farms had been lost.

We ministered to an average of 160 patients a day, providing medicines from CWS and from supplies that members of our team had brought. Although most of the immediate medical consequences of Mitch were past, we still encountered numerous cases of infections, skin problems, intestinal parasites, stomach complaints, and generalized aches and pains, mostly chronic and aggravated by extreme poverty. These are people who have lived on the edge all their lives, and the hurricane just pushed them over.

What we were able to do medically was rather meager, but its importance as a gesture that people in the United States care was great. One small incident stands out in my memory. After crossing Rio Jicatuyo two by two on a crude log raft (the bridge was out), and walking three miles to the village of Las Flores, we set up a clinic in a very dark one-room school. As I struggled in the light of a small window, a skylight suddenly developed as roof tiles were removed, bathing my work space in light. I almost expected a patient to be lowered to my feet for healing, but had to conclude that my medical qualifications were not up to that expectation (see Mark 2:4). But I do hope and pray that our presence among the suffering people of Honduras brought a little light into their lives.



*Dr. Braun at work in Honduras*

## *Allen Retreat Center Committee Begins New Campaign*

The Board of Directors of the Southeast Conference has approved a campaign to raise the money to complete Phase I of the Allen Retreat Center development. Having raised \$40,000 to this point, the Allen Retreat Center Committee has set as a target to raise an additional \$60,000 before the end of December 1999. This money will complete the amount needed for offices, a pavilion with a kitchen, bathrooms and showers, as well as facilities for camping and RV parking.

A letter is being distributed to all of our congregations inviting them to participate in the support of the Allen Retreat Center and encouraging them to invite speakers and distribute brochures. The Committee expressed its deep indebtedness to Ms. Lala Allen for the generosity she showed through the gift of land for our Retreat Center. Look for continuing news about our campaign!

## *Voices & Visions*

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# *Cuba Connection*

## *Study Seminars an Annual Event*

### *By Ted Braun*

The United Church of Christ connection to Cuba began in 1979, when the Ecumenical Council of Cuba invited the UCC to send a delegation for a visit. Since then, UCC study seminars in Cuba have become an annual event. At the last General Synod, the relationship was further strengthened when the UCC entered into partnership with the Cuban Council of Churches (formerly the Ecumenical Council). Through the annual visits over the past 20 years, deep ties of fellowship and solidarity have been built with a wide variety of lay people and clergy in the churches, as well as with the national ecumenical seminary, health and educational organizations, cultural groups (such as the National Chorus of Cuba), and individuals who have lived through, and participated in, Cuba's dynamic history of the past 50 years.

This is an exciting time in Cuba. Although the U.S. blockade still causes great suffering because of its denial of food, medicine, and medical equipment to the Cuban people, a strong feeling of determination and hope exists. The churches are full, with many seekers and new members coming into the life and mission of the church.

During the mornings and afternoons, the seminars provide an introduction to the health, education, and welfare aspects of Cuba. The evenings are filled with conversation in homes with people from various walks of life, as well as attendance at cultural events such as musical and dance programs. The next two-week seminar will take place in late January 2000.

Seventeen members of Community United Church of Christ in Pleasant Hill, Tennessee, have been to Cuba. They have proposed to the congregation that a partner church relationship be established with one of the churches in Cuba, the Second Baptist Church of Santiago de Cuba. This church has had a long history of involvement in the nation's independence movement. It was recently successful in its struggle to have the wife of its pastor become the first Baptist woman in eastern Cuba to be ordained. She is now co-pastor of the church, and also first vice president of the Cuban Council of Churches.

Ties were already established several years ago when Pleasant Hill church sent several sets of communion trays and cups to the Santiago church, to help meet the needs of its growing membership. Such ties have a powerful effect in breaking down the "dividing wall of hostility" between peoples and nations, and demonstrating the unity and peace that is ours in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:14-15).

Congratulations to Rev. Braun on the recent publication of his book *Perspectives on Cuba and Its People*, which reviews the history of Cuba and highlights the voices of a variety of Cubans today. The book, and other helpful information on Cuba—including a map, video, and children's resource—are available from Friendship Press, P.O. Box 37844, Cincinnati, OH; 1-800-889-5733.

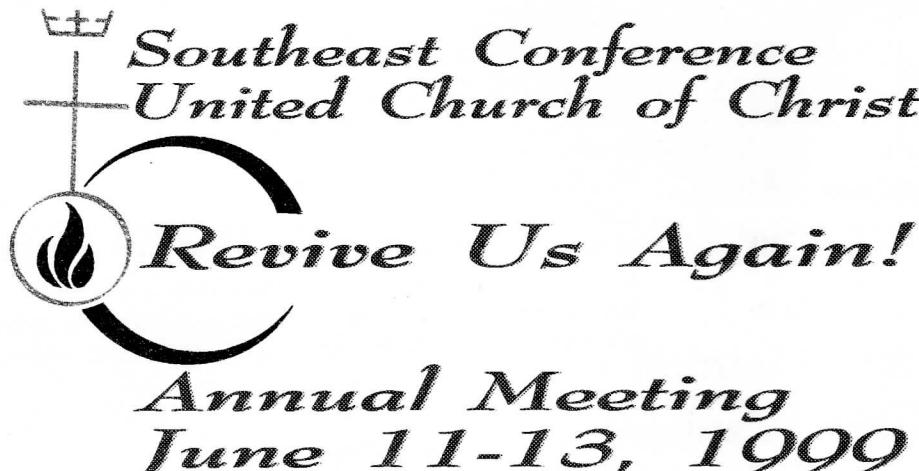
## *East Alabama/West Georgia Association Celebrates Ladies Night*

On Saturday, February 20, people from congregations throughout East Alabama and West Georgia gathered for a night of fellowship and celebration at Southern Union College in Wadley, Alabama. We entered the hall serenaded by the gospel music of the Cross Roads Quartet. We were welcomed by Rip Hardman, president of the Men's Fellowship. Roy Bain installed Travis Moon as Vice President of the Men's Fellowship.

In an awards ceremony organized by Jim Johnson, every minister present received a certificate of appreciation for Pastor of the Year, noting that each had shown "outstanding contributions to the unselfish sharing of time and energy in continuing service to God's work." Likewise, a certificate of appreciation was distributed to each lay woman and each lay man, as Lay Woman and Lay Man of the Year.

Perhaps the highlight of the evening was a moving speech by Rip Hardman on what it meant to him to be a part of the Congregational Christian heritage in the United Church of Christ. Rip began by saying, "This special United Church of Christ welcomed and loved someone like me when I needed to know that others cared." He remembered Warren Blankenhorn's mentoring and Annie Ruth Polk's peanut butter cookies. He recalled mission trips with Louise Cox and praying for peace before the Gulf War in the Lanett Congregational Christian Church, UCC. He spoke of his tears when Jimmy Pilkington sang and special trips to Elon Children's Home to deliver extra gifts. He remembered being a part of the Partners in Education program of the United Church of Christ and meeting new friends. Rip named a cloud of witnesses and a host of saints, who have marked his pilgrimage of faith, and in so doing reminded us all of the preciousness of our connections as family.

The Annual Meeting of the Southeast Conference—"Revive Us Again!"—will be held June 11-13 at the United Church of Huntsville, Alabama. It will begin at 6:00 p.m. (CT) on Friday, June 11, and will adjourn at noon on Sunday, June 13. We have invited the entire staff of the Division of Evangelism and Local Church Development of the UCC Board for Homeland Ministries, to be with us for a time focused on equipping our congregations for renewed and more effective ministry. This uplifting weekend will feature celebration, worship, music, and testimony. Workshop topics include the Covenant for Renewal, Stewardship, Music, Effective Evangelism, Worship, and many more. **The Annual Meeting is open to all members of all of our congregations in the Southeast Conference. Circle the dates on your calendar and plan to be with us!**



All resolutions to be submitted for consideration at the Annual Meeting must be received by Conference Minister Tim Downs at the Conference Office by **April 19**. No resolutions received after that date can be considered.

## FYI

"Justice in Politics," the **29<sup>th</sup> Annual Interfaith Public Policy Briefing**, sponsored by the United Church of Christ and several other denominations and justice organizations, will take place in Washington, D.C., **April 25-28, 1999**. The event offers an opportunity to network, dialogue, and learn from others concerned about economic justice, human rights, and public policy. If interested, get a brochure from the Southeast Conference Office, or call 202-543-2800 to register immediately.

The Southern Conference of the UCC offers a variety of **Outdoor Ministry Programs**, including holiday weekends and week-long camps, for youth, adults, and mentally challenged persons. Brochures are available at the Conference Office, or consult the Southern Conference web page: [www.netpath.net/~soc-ucc](http://www.netpath.net/~soc-ucc).

The Montana-Northern Wyoming Conference, the Central Pacific Conference, and the Office for Church Life and Leadership are sponsoring "**When Clouds Cross the Sky: A Recovery of Call Retreat for Clergy in Conflict.**" The retreat will take place **June 21-24** at Camp Mimanaish on Montana's Boulder River (near Yellowstone National Park). It is an opportunity for clergy and their spouses who have been hurt by conflict to recover their call. Brochures are available at the Conference Office, or call 406-656-8688.

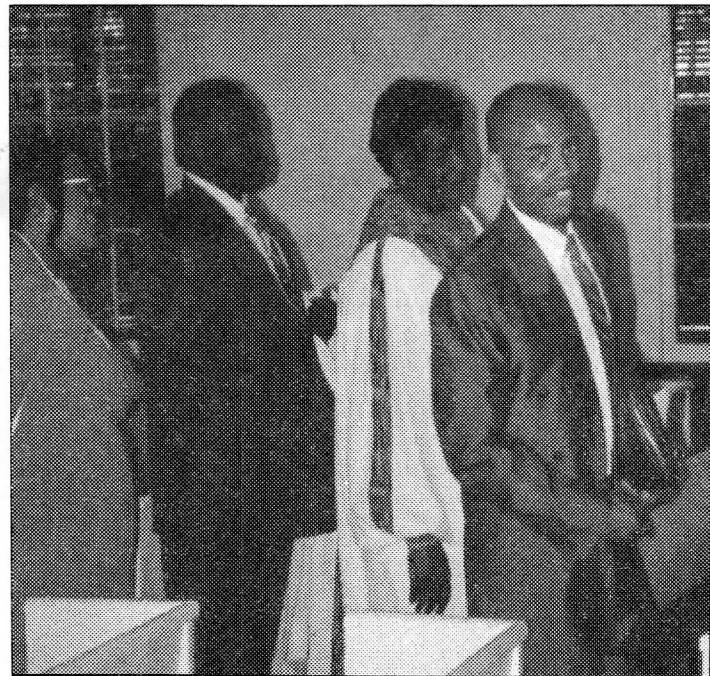
Efforts are growing to close down the **School of the Americas** at Fort Benning, Ga, because of reports of human rights abuses carried out by its graduates. A rally will be held in **Washington, D.C., May 1-4**, in an effort to convince Congress to limit funding to the School. Contact Wally Ryan Kuroiwa at the Washington Office for Church in Society (202-543-1517). To register your opinion with your representative in Congress, call 202-224-3121.

**Ministerial and local church profiles** are now available at the UCC web site. Go to [www.ucc.org/ministers](http://www.ucc.org/ministers).

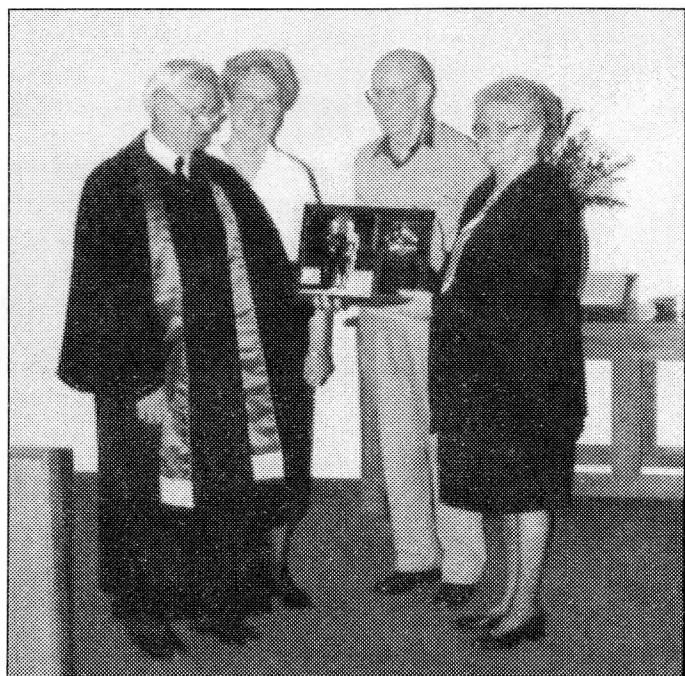
Congratulations are in order. The UCC Office of Communication was awarded the "**Best of Class**" award from the Religion Communicators Council for its NBC special "Images of Race at the Movies," produced by OC Executive Director Arthur L. Cribbs. UCC member Ian Barbour, a retired physics professor from UCC-related Carleton College in Minnesota, won the prestigious \$1.24 million **Templeton Prize**, which honors individuals who have shown extraordinary originality in advancing the understanding of God or spirituality.

# CONFERENCE CALENDAR

	<b>12-14</b>	Regional Stewardship Consultation (St. Simon's Island, GA)
	<b>15</b>	Allen Retreat Center Planning Committee Meeting (Lanett, AL)
	<b>17</b>	EAL/WGA Executive Committee Meeting (Lanett, AL)
<i>A</i>	<b>20</b>	Church & Ministry Commission Meeting (Atlanta, GA)
<i>P</i>	<b>21</b>	Annual Meeting Planning Committee (Huntsville, AL)
<i>R</i>		
<i>I</i>	<b>23-24</b>	Board of Directors Meeting (Lanett, AL)
<i>L</i>	<b>27</b>	EAL/WGA Ministers Gathering (LaGrange, GA)
	<b>29</b>	ALA/TEN Church & Ministry Committee Meeting (Birmingham, AL)
	<b>30- 2</b>	Mini Camp - Noah's Ark (Panama City Beach, FL)
	<b>1</b>	GA/SC Church & Ministry Committee Meeting (Atlanta, GA)
	<b>7 - 8</b>	Christian Education Commission Meeting (Atlanta, GA)
<i>M</i>	<b>8</b>	Church Development & Evangelism Commission Meeting (Birmingham, AL)
<i>A</i>	<b>10-12</b>	SOC/SEC Clergy Retreat (Blowing Rock, NC)
<i>Y</i>	<b>14</b>	ALA/TEN Church & Ministry Committee Meeting (Atlanta, GA)
	<b>14-15</b>	Church & Ministry Commission/Committee Training/ Retreat (Atlanta, GA)
	<b>19</b>	Annual Meeting Planning Committee (Huntsville, AL)



*Pastor Eulas Kirtdoll (right) and the members of First Congregational UCC of Marion, Ala., celebrated the church's 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary on March 28 with a service and meal.*



*In a surprise ceremony, members of Russell Woods Congregational Christian Church in Phenix City, Ala., honored Rev. Warner Noles for his 20 years of faithful and dedicated service.*

# *Southeast Feast*

## *Food for the Heart and Soul*

*By Joyce Hollyday*



In the spring of 1997, I made a visit to the Holy Land. I discovered that many chapels have been built on the "traditional sites" of Jesus' life and ministry—places that *might have been* where the angels appeared to the shepherds, or where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount or fed the five thousand. But one site historians are sure of is the Garden of Gethsemane—not a garden as we picture one, but a grove of olive trees just outside the walled city of Jerusalem.

A chapel encloses the rock on which it is believed Jesus wept the night before his death. When I reached out and touched that rock, I wept too. I have always found Maundy Thursday to be the most poignant moment in the church year. I sometimes wonder if the agonizing pain of crucifixion wasn't matched by the terrible torment of betrayal and denial by Jesus' closest friends.

"Remain here, and keep awake," Jesus pleaded with his inner circle as he went off to pray, fearful as the shadow of death hovered near (Mark 14:34). But he returned and found them sleeping. "Could you not keep awake one hour?" He left them once more, and again returned to find them sleeping. And then a third time.

Three times the disciples failed him. Three times Peter denied him. With a heavy and desolate heart, Jesus went to the cross.

After his Resurrection, Jesus appeared one morning by the sea at dawn to seven of his disciples (John 21). After they shared breakfast, Jesus turned directly to Peter. "Do you love me more than these?" Jesus asked him. "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus asked again. Again Peter proclaimed his love. Jesus asked a third time. Peter "felt hurt," the scripture says, because Jesus asked three times. Peter didn't understand, at first, the tremendous gentleness and mercy in those questions. Three denials wiped away by three affirmations of love.

"Feed my lambs"; "Tend my sheep"; "Feed my sheep," Jesus said after Peter's three proclamations. This is how we give thanks for Christ's mercy, for the forgiveness that is offered every time we fail to stay "awake" to a need, every time we deny or betray. Jesus is saying to us all, "Take care of all my children." We honor Christ—and proclaim his Resurrection—when we feed and tend to those in need around us.

## *Conference Clips*

The **annual Mini Camp for youth** has been rescheduled. It will take place **April 30-May 2 at Noah's Ark, Panama City Beach, Florida**. All youth throughout the Southeast Conference are welcome to join us. The theme is "The United Church of Christ Comes Alive." The weekend will feature information and programs related to the UCC: who we are and what we believe! This event will take place in collaboration with the Florida Conference. Information will be mailed out to all congregations concerning fees, directions, and other particulars. Please mark the dates and plan to bring your youth to this wonderful opportunity.

Southern Conference clergy have invited all clergy of the Southeast Conference to join them for their **Annual Clergy Retreat, May 10-12, at the Blowing Rock Assembly Ground in Blowing Rock, N.C.** Rev. Loren Mead will be the keynoter. Rev. Mead is known for his work through the Alban Institute and his numerous books and publications concerning the future of the church.

The Women's Fellowship at **Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta**, in conjunction with the Women's Committee of the Georgia-South Carolina Association, is **hosting all Atlanta-area UCC women on Thursday, May 6, at 6:00 p.m.** The evening will include fellowship, dinner, and a program entitled "Traveling with a Purpose." The speaker will be Luci Avery, a social services administrator who has traveled to Guatemala, the Czech Republic, and Turkey. Contact Joyce Myers-Brown at 404-876-2421.

Congratulations to **Rev. Joseph Ingle**, executive director of a neighborhood mediation center in Nashville, author, and renowned activist against the death penalty. Joe will be honored on April 24 as the Outstanding Alumnus of Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Dick Wagoner of Pilgrimage UCC in Marietta, Ga., has a **Hammond organ for sale**. Its model is the "Commodore 300 series," vintage 1980 or '81, with walnut cabinet and bench, two keyboards, two octaves of bass foot pedals, built-in speaker, percussion and string voicing, and lots of other features only an organ player (and not a newsletter editor) could understand and appreciate. A great deal at \$500, this organ would be fine for a church or individual. Contact Dick at 770-642-9069 (home) or 770-750-6137 (work).



*Alleluia!*  
*Christ Is Risen!*

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